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January 7, 1986

Dr. Harold Varmus
Dept. of Microbiology
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University of California Medical School
San Francisco, CA 94143

Dear Harold,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a conference on Science and the Media to be held on April 19, 1986 at the Harvard School of Public Health. In particular, we would like you to be part of a panel on "The Reporting of AIDS and AIDS Research." The full program is enclosed.

The members of the planning group for this conference are myself, Dr. Eric Lander, Assistant Professor of Mathematics at Harvard University and Harvard Business School, and Michael Filisky, a marine educator at the Boston Aquarium. (Eric is now working with David Botstein on mathematical analysis of RFLP approaches and working in Bob Horvitz's lab.) Sponsors of the conference are Science for the People, of which we are members, The Boston Globe, The Bush Program for Science Journalists at MIT, the New England Science Writers' Association, the Northeastern Technical and Professional Writing Program and the Boston Chapter of the National Writers' Union.

We believe that the reporting on the disease AIDS and AIDS research embodies many of the successes and failures of science reporting. Issues that might be considered for discussion by the panel are 1) whether there was underreporting of AIDS in the early days, 2) what role attitudes towards homosexuals may have played in the reporting at various stages, 3) the coverage of AIDS in Africa, 4) the evaluation of scientific reports on progress in AIDS research, including epidemiological and molecular biological research and the search for cures. Questions that may be raised in this and other workshops are 1) how can science reporters better evaluate the significance of scientists' statements? 2) What factors determine that new information is communicated to the media from researchers? 3) How can science reporters in the future give a fair picture of the prospects both for the spread of the disease and the possibilities of cures?

David Baltimore tells me that you have followed AIDS research quite closely. We were looking for someone with this expertise who was not directly involved in the research.

Dr. Harold Varmus

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One problem may be money. We currently have applications in to several foundations. We are hopeful after discussions with the Sloan Foundation that they will fund us, but there is no certainty. If you are interested in participating and are able to come, could you let us know. Then we will let you know about funds. Or, is there a chance you will be in the East at that time?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Jon', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jon Beckwith

JB/am

encl: